



## African Burial Ground Honored as National Monument

The African Burial Ground National Historic Landmark Site in New York City has now been designated as a National Monument by President George W. Bush. Announcement of the designation was made by Secretary of the Interior Gale A. Norton at an event in New York City at the Ted Weiss Federal Office Building in lower Manhattan, adjacent to the Burial Ground.

GSA Acting Administrator David L. Bibb, Northeast and Caribbean Region Administrator Eileen Long-Chelales, and other GSA officials joined with Secretary Norton, representatives of the National Park Service and other federal state and local officials for the announcement.

"It is entirely fitting for the African Burial Ground to be officially recognized as one of our nation's most significant historic treasures," said Acting Administrator Bibb, speaking during the event in acknowledgement of the historic property's elevated status as a national monument.

Already a New York City Historic District and designated as a National Landmark in 1993, the proclamation declaring the African Burial Ground as a National Monument was signed by President George W. Bush on Feb. 27.

Since its discovery in 1991 during the pre-construction excavation for the federal office building at 290 Broadway in lower Manhattan, GSA has worked with experts in the scientific, historic and educational communities; other federal agency partners; the descendant and broader community; the art and architecture communities; and many others on the African Burial Ground Project.

"Today's announcement is the achievement of a significant milestone in the fulfillment of the federal government's commitment to memorialize the African Burial Ground," said Regional Administrator Long-Chelales.

Early in the project, archeologists carefully exhumed the human remains of 419 men, women, and children, as well as artifacts, from the construction site for scientific and historical research. During the

previous 200 years prior to the rediscovery of the burial ground, most of the original seven-acre site was disregarded while buildings, streets, and parking lots were constructed over the site.

Considered the largest Colonial-era cemetery for enslaved and free Africans in America, it is believed to be the final resting place for more than 15,000 Africans. The discovery of surviving burials deeply impacted the descendant and broader community and, at the same time, renewed awareness in cultural significance and historic preservation. Noted archeologists, anthropologists, and historians have studied the remains at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

A major milestone was achieved in October 2003, when GSA led the effort to facilitate the timely and dignified return of the human remains to their final resting place at the African Burial Ground. The reinterment ceremonies were held across six cities and culminated with the reburial of the 419 human remains and related artifacts on October 4 in New York City. The ceremonies, attended by thousands, were dignified, respectful, and international in scope.

"This designation ensures that all who visit the site - now and in the future - understand the many contributions that enslaved African men, women and children made to the economy, development and culture of colonial America," said Bibb.

During the past several years GSA's efforts have brought about significant achievement on its African Burial Ground project. Other recent accomplishments include the following:

#### **Scientific Reports and Studies:**

The Howard University team has continued its preparation of the scientific research and submitted to GSA the final History, Skeletal Biology Reports and Archaeology Reports, all of which can be found on the website: [www.africanburialground.gov](http://www.africanburialground.gov)

#### **Artifact Reproduction:**

In partnership with the National Park Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, and Howard University, GSA has identified a series of artifacts for reproduction that will be displayed in the Interpretive Center, once it is constructed. Artifact reproduction is currently ongoing through the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and is on schedule for completion in 2006.

#### **Exterior Memorial:**

GSA has engaged the National Park Service to help guide the planning and development of the Exterior Memorial and the Interpretive Center. The National Park Service, in concert with the GSA,

conducted introduction meetings, listening sessions, and public forums to gather public input that helped to shape the outcome of this project. During the past year GSA announced the selection of Rodney Leon as the architect for a permanent Exterior Memorial for the site. Construction is anticipated to begin shortly. To learn more about Rodney Leon's design for the Exterior Memorial, visit the African Burial Ground website at [www.africanburialground.gov](http://www.africanburialground.gov)

#### **Public Education and Outreach and Interpretive Center:**

The Office of Public Education and Interpretation is now under the management of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a component of the NY Public Library. In addition, the OPEI has recently relocated and reopened in space adjacent to the African Burial Ground, where they are in a better location to serve the public.

Finally, GSA has entered into an agreement with the National Park Service to utilize their experience and knowledge on interpretive centers to facilitate the design and construction of the future African Burial Ground Interpretive Center.

#### **Archiving and Curation of Documents, Records and Materials:**

GSA has asked the Army Corps of Engineers to identify and locate all documents created over more than ten years of this project. A wide variety of documentation photography, research documents, and artwork is being compiled for the project along with a plan for long-term curation of these materials. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has been selected as the repository for this material.

Howard University is currently acting as a interim repository for all osteological and dental samples (DNA) not being studied under a research grant with the scientific researchers until they can also be transferred to the future long-term curation facility in New York City.

#### **Interior Memorialization:**

GSA has installed several permanent works of art, each referential to the African Burial Ground, that currently grace the lobby and exterior of the federal office building adjacent to the ABG National Historic Site. The installations include:

- "Africa Rising" - a bronze sculpture by Barbara Chase Riboud
- "America Song" - a fiber-optic and stone bas-relief by Clyde Lynds
- "The New Ring Shout" – a cosmogram by Houston Conwill, with Estella Conwill Majozo and Joseph DePace
- "Renewal" - a silk screen by Tomei Arai

- “Untitled” - a mosaic by Roger Brown.

In another work, “Unearthed,” forensic artist Frank Bender evocatively recreates the facial features of three colonial-era Africans by using the skulls of two women, one old and one young, and a young man who were buried at the site.

**Web site:**

The African Burial Ground web site was created to provide updated information relating to the reinterment ceremony and related events, the history of the African Burial Ground, the Exterior Memorial, and the Interpretive Center. More information on GSA’s African Burial Ground project can be found at: [www.africanburialground.gov](http://www.africanburialground.gov)

To read the Presidential Proclamation, click [here](#).

To read the GSA press release, click [here](#).